

Students learn history by living it at Cache farm

By Susan Lyman
Deseret News staff writer

Life on a family farm in Utah's Cache Valley at the turn of the century meant two things: hard labor and rich produce.

Take the Wyatt family. On their Cache Valley farm they had dairy cows, fruit trees, gardens, hay fields, chickens, a few pigs and a few sheep.

They sheared their sheep with hand-held clippers and the wool rolled off in a thick matted blanket, fairly shining with lanolin. They didn't have many sheep, and what wool they got they used for clothing or sold at the Barron's Woolen Mill in Brigham City. They got top price.

Today their farm is the Ronald V. Jensen Living Historical Farm. There, students from Utah State University study and work

Ronald V. Jensen Living Historical Farm

The Ronald V. Jensen farm is about six miles south of Logan on U.S. 89-91, about 1½ hours from Salt Lake City. Admission is \$2 for adults, \$1 for senior citizens, 50 cents for children or \$5 for a family. For more information write to: Ronald V. Jensen Living Historical Farm, Wellsville, UT 84339, or phone 245-4064.

Schedule of special events:

June 14-17 Fife Folklore Conference



PHOTOGRAPHY/ DON GRAYSTON

The woolly faces, above, take a definite interest as graduate students John Cash and Reese Simmons, right, turn the crank of a 1902 Stewart Ballbearing Sheep-Shearing Machine for farm manager Larry Miller.



July 4	1917 Baseball Game
July 22-28	Grain Harvest
July 29-Aug. 8	Threshing Bee
Aug. 27	Old Folks Day
Oct. 8	Apple Harvest
Oct. 29	Halloween
Nov. 19	Hog Butchering
Dec. 10 & 17	Christmas in 1917

for a year, laboring in the same way the Wyatts did. They learn history by living it, earning a graduate degree at the same time.

"Ours is the only outdoor living history program in the nation that trains people to work in outdoor living history museums," says Jay Anderson, director of the farm and professor of history at USU. The graduate program is limited to six or seven students each year. Anderson says recent graduates (who have either a master's degree in American studies or history with an emphasis in outdoor museum studies) are working in places like Williamsburg or, locally, Pioneer Trails State Park.

"It's a unique program because one day a student may be in the library doing research and the next day be on the farm canning beets and the day after that taking an oral history from one of the older residents of the valley."

All students work on the farm full time in the summer months, though. That's the time when the farm is always open to tourists.

And the students are there on the special days, too, like the day for shearing sheep.

"You couldn't have picked a bigger one could you?" asks Larry Miller, the manager of the Jensen farm. The first ewe his students have selected for him to shear weighs more than 200 pounds, which is obviously more than Miller weighs. Still, he can handle her.

He wrestles her into a sitting position and that's it. Her wool is as good as off. For, unless he cuts her in a tender spot, she's going to keep on sitting. Sitting is an unnatural and very foolish-looking position for a sheep. But sit she does, lolling against Miller's legs for a half-hour while he labors through her thick wool with his sharp shears.

From a New Zealander, Miller learned to



shear by hand. "Professionals can do it in four minutes," he says, explaining to five or six parents and preschoolers exactly what it is he's doing. However, not wanting the children to see a frighteningly bloody scene, Miller takes his time and tries to avoid nicking the ewe.

Sweating as he works in the cold barn, Miller talks about selective breeding. He buys, breeds, and sells sheep according to his plan for a historically accurate herd — 10 Rambouillet sheep that look exactly like sheep looked 75 years ago. "I'm trying to unimprove the herd," he says. "Modern

sheep are large with open faces and smooth skin — all good characteristics for shearing.

"But old-fashioned sheep had to be trimmed twice a year. Their wool grew so close to their eyes they couldn't see; it grew so thick the lambs couldn't nurse."

Miller says he often travels to sheep sales in isolated places like the Navajo Indian reservation, looking for the small sheep with wrinkled faces and "yokey" (lanolin-rich) wool.

He finishes the first ewe without a nick. She clambers quickly back into the pen,

bleats twice in angry protest, and then seems to forget all about the indignities.

Miller shears the second ewe with a hand-cranked shearing machine. This particular model — which sold for \$19.50 in 1897 and was still being sold in the Sears catalog in the 1920s for \$45 — is supposed to be turned by one person. The students found it quite tiring, however. It took at least two students per sheep. And Miller, after struggling with the contraption on two sheep, decided to go back to the even more old-fashioned shears for the rest of the herd.

So much for progress.



Miller learned the technique of shearing sheep by hand from a New Zealander. The object is to remove the wool in one piece — that brings the best price.

Miller got about 10 pounds of wool from each of the sheep. Because he is an expert shearer, he kept the wool all in a piece. That means it can be spun into long-fibered, high-quality yarn.

Because the sheep had been out in the rain the night before, Miller bundled the wool loosely to let it dry. Later he would stuff it into sacks and sell it.

Coincidentally, the Barron's Woolen Mill still operates in Brigham City. When the students take in the hand-shorn wool from their old-fashioned wrinkled sheep, Miller expects to get \$1.40 per pound. Top price.